

INFORMATION FOR THE PRESS



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF INFORMATION
PRESS SERVICE



Release - Immediate.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

June 4, 1934.

SEVEN MILLION RATS DIE IN CWA
TYPHUS-FEVER CONTROL CAMPAIGN

- - -

Carried on in 3 States; Results
Include Economic Savings of
More Than \$8,000,000

- - -

More than 7,500,000 rats were destroyed as a result of Civil Works Administration projects carried on from December 15 to March 29 in Georgia, Alabama, and Texas, reports the Bureau of Biological Survey, U. S. Department of Agriculture. The rats were killed through poisoning and trapping operations supervised by the Biological Survey in a cooperative campaign for control of typhus fever conducted with the Bureau of the Public Health Service of the Department of the Treasury, and the State health departments.

The effect of the campaign in controlling typhus fever will not become apparent until late in the year, but Biological Survey officials estimate that the rat riddance alone represents an economic saving of more than 12 times its cost. "Rat damage to produce and property," says James Silver, regional supervisor of rodent control, "is conceded to average \$2 a year per rat. In many cases where complete results were obtained during the CWA campaign, a number of years may elapse before reinfestation occurs, but on the average 7 months of rat riddance may be relied upon. The destruction of 7,500,000 of these rodents, resulting in freedom from rats for an average of 7 months, thus represents an economic saving of approximately \$8,750,000."

2745-34

Costs of the rat control in the three States totaled \$672,962, including wages for nearly 10,000 men employed for a total of 1,112,323 hours.

Typhus-Fever Control Main Object

The prime object of the anti-rat campaign, officials point out, was to control typhus fever. To this end it was necessary to eliminate rats, which serve as hosts for fleas that carry the disease organism. These rodents become infected from fleas and develop symptoms of typhus fever, but they rarely, if ever, die of the disease. Rats in turn infect other fleas, which remain capable of transmitting typhus fever to other rats and to man.

Red Squill Used for Poison

The CWA workers, explains the Biological Survey, first treated all premises in the typhus-fever areas with baits containing red squill--an effective rat poison that does not seriously menace the lives of other animals. This raticide, perfected by the Department of Agriculture, is objectionable to most animals and in addition acts as an emetic, but rats eat it readily when it is mixed with a suitable food and, as they are unable to vomit, it causes their death.

Using red-squill baits, the workers treated 355,133 premises in 70 counties of Georgia, 279,801 premises in 21 counties of Alabama, and 112,674 in 45 Texas counties. They distributed more than 800,000 pounds of bait, which Bureau officials estimate killed more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ million rats in Georgia, more than 2 million in Alabama, and nearly $1\frac{1}{4}$ million in Texas--a total of approximately 6,904,000 rats poisoned.

"This estimate," says Mr. Silver, who has had long experience in rat control, "is very conservative. We first made a calculation based on the number of poisoned rats actually found in one county of Alabama and this calculation was cut practically in half to arrive at the final estimate quoted."

Traps Used in Follow-Up Campaign

The workers also conducted trapping operations, but almost exclusively to clean up premises where rats remained after poisoning. By actual count it was found that 623,000 rats were thus caught with traps, in addition to those poisoned, on less than a third of the total premises treated. Added to the estimate of rats poisoned, this figure makes the total estimate of rats destroyed 7,527,000.